



## **A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Supporting all Learners in the Classroom**

## Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Who is in your Classroom 3

Who is in your corner 8

There is Room for Everyone 9

Teacher Wish List 14

Inclusion in the classroom 15

Everyone Deserves the Right 17

Understanding Compliance 21

References 25

# What is Disability Inclusion?

Inclusion in the classroom ensures all students have equal access to educational opportunities.

Many students with disabilities whether intellectual, or specific learning may often experience feelings of low self-esteem/self-efficacy embarrassment, stress, or discomfort in multiple areas of their life such as their home but most noticeably when engaging in group work with their peers. This is why addressing or challenging negative stereotypes and attitudes that might impact students' participation in their educational experience is important.



## Why It is Important?

When educators, administrators, or staff foster an inclusive environment, it helps to ensure that students with disabilities feel a sense of belonging and are noticed and understood. This helps build confidence in their abilities but helps to dismiss negative feelings towards their disabilities. Furthermore, disability inclusion in the classroom plays a significant role in shaping a student's experience beyond their time in the educational system. Disability inclusion is essential for all for overall development, social integration, health and wellness. When students feel included, it helps to foster a sense of belonging, feeling seen and heard, and most importantly feel valued.

# Who is in your Classroom?

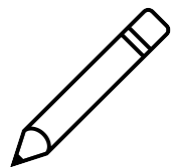
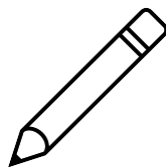
In a general education classroom, an educator can have students with a wide range of diagnoses and needs. Here are a few that may be common:

Attention Disorders

Learning Disabilities

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Sensory Processing Disorder



**Let us take a closer look at each one...**

# Learning Disability

Specific Learning Disabilities (LD) are neurologically based and can affect various domains of learning, such as writing (dysgraphia), reading (dyslexia), and math (dyscalculia). Dysgraphia is neurological condition that makes written language difficult. Dyslexia is language-based LD that can impact a student's spelling, writing or pronunciation of words. Dyscalculia is an LD that impacts a student's ability to conceptualize and understand numbers or facts. (To learn more about each, click on the link at bottom of page.)

## Areas of Difficulties

Due to brain processing differences, people with LD tend to have increased difficulties with specific learning tasks, such as executive functioning skills. These cognitive abilities include planning and organization, attention, memory, and abstract reasoning.

## Statistics

According to Learning Disabilities Association, **1 in 5** children are affected by LD, making it the largest category under special education law. Understood.org surveyed educators and revealed that **only 30%** of general educators feel equipped to teach kids with LD. Teachers reported they need more resources and training to ensure they are providing an inclusive classroom to promote satisfactory success for students with LD.

More on learning disabilities below:

[Learning Disability Fact Sheet](#)

# Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

ADHD can impact various areas in a child's life including academic performance and social participation. On average **30-60%** of children that are diagnosed with ADHD struggle with maintaining or making friendships, interpreting social cues, and meeting social expectations.

## Areas of Difficulties

Common areas of concern include difficulties with listening, sharing, and turn-taking — skills essential for successful classroom behavior. Additionally, students with ADHD also show impulsive behavior that can be disruptive or inappropriate for classroom behaviors.

## Statistics

The CDC reports that around **9-10%** of school-aged children are diagnosed with ADHD. It also has been reported by the International Journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being that on **average 30-50%** of general education teachers feel equipped to manage students with ADHD. The article also reported many educators have negative feelings towards their students with ADHD such as frustrated or overwhelmed due to the challenges that ADHD presents daily in their classroom management (i.e., off-task behaviors)

More on attention disorder below:

[ADHD Fact Sheet](#)

# Sensory Processing Disorder

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition that affects how the brain processes and interprets sensory information. Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) manifests differently in everyone, as everyone has unique sensory needs and thresholds. There are 3 types and 6 subtypes of SPD. Here are two common types.

Hypersensitivity	Hyposensitivity
<b>Avoids:</b>	<b>Seeks:</b>
Loud Noises	Loud, Repetitive Noises
Crowded spaces	Swinging, Crashing or Jumping
Smells	Tight Squeezes
Bright Lights	Lack of pain response

## [Hyper vs Hyposensitivity](#)

## Areas of Difficulties

Individuals with SPD may experience heightened or diminished sensitivity to sensory stimuli, such as touch, sound, light, taste, and smell. This can lead to a range of challenges, from discomfort in everyday environments to difficulties with coordination and emotional regulation.

## Statistics

According to Brain Sciences, it is estimated that **5%-13%** of children are diagnosed with SPD. On **average 50%** of general education teachers feel equipped to manage students with SPD.

More on Sensory Processing Disorder below:  
[Sensory Processing Disorder Fact Sheet](#)

# Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental and neurological condition that can affect how an individual interacts with others, communicates, behaves, and learns. Individuals may communicate verbally or non-verbally, such as facial expressions, gestures, and mimics of sounds.

## Areas of Difficulties

Individuals may also may or may not exhibit behaviors such as hand-flapping, rocking, echoing sounds, or persevering on items. Children may become focused on routines and distressed when they are disrupted or not followed.

## Statistics

According to the CDC, **1 in 36** children are diagnosed with Autism. According to Gómez-Marí (2022), an **average 50-60%** of general education teachers feel equipped to manage students with SPD.

More on Autism Spectrum Disorder Below:

[Autism Spectrum Disorder Fact Sheet](#)



## Who is in your Corner?

Always remember you do not have to figure it out on your own. In every public school you will find professionals who specialize in disability inclusion that you may see in your classrooms.

Here are a few:

Occupational Therapist (OT)

Physical Therapist (PT)

Speech Language Pathologist  
(SLP)

Each of these specialized services is crucial in assisting students with their educational activities and helping them achieve their academic and personal potential. They collaborate with teachers, school staff, and parents to develop and implement appropriate strategies and accommodations to ensure that each student can participate effectively in the educational environment.

More on OT/PT below:

[OT/PT NCHPAD Resource](#)

# There is Room for Everyone

Sensory tools are very effective and inclusive tools for managing classroom disruptions. Here is why...

**Reduces stress:** Different textures or sensory input from the toys can help regulate a student's emotions and help them feel more comfortable in their learning environment

**Increased Engagement:** Some students may need more dynamic ways to interact with their materials, and sensory toys can help stimulate the part of their brain to attend and focus on what is expected of them.

**Inclusivity:** Sensory toys support the diverse needs of all students in the classroom. Many students with SPD, ADHD, or autism require more help to regulate sensitivity input and energy.

While some sensory tools might appear to be mere toys, research shows that providing students with opportunities for movement can significantly enhance their learning and behavior. Even small actions like squeezing a ball, flicking a spinning toy, or watching glitter fall from a bottle can improve attention and address task-related challenges. Although gross motor activities are often the most effective for redirecting energy, they are not always a feasible solution. Sensory items offer a practical, discreet, and simple intervention that is accessible to all students.

# There is Room for Everyone

Consider adding sensory tools to your **teacher's wish list** if they are outside your budget! This is a cost-effective way to enhance your classroom environment. Here are some helpful items with links to include on your wish list:

## Fidget Toys

- **Fidget spinners:** Great for keeping little hands busy.
- **Stress balls:** Effective physical outlet/distractions for stress, and tension.
- **Putty or slime:** Offers tactile feedback and is soothing for many students.

## Sensory Bottles

- **Calming bottles:** Filled with glitter, beads, or other materials that settle slowly when shaken, these can help provide positive proprioceptive input (bodies' ability to sense movement, action, and location) and help to regulate breathing to help regulate emotions.

## Visual Sensory Tools

- **Light projectors:** Lights can create calming effects, as well as increase attention span.
- **Color-changing lamps:** Provide soothing effects and can be adjusted to suit different needs.

## Other practical, affordable common day objects

- Rubber bands
- Cotton balls
- Pipe cleaners
- Balloons + flour = homemade stress balls
- Velcro strips

- **Paint in a Ziplock bag**

\*Many students may have a latex allergy, so using latex-free balloons, and supplies can ensure every material is inclusive for everyone!

## There is Room for Everyone

Disclaimer: While every student has their own unique ways of learning, it is essential that you recognize and understand that some may learn best through hands-on experiences (movement), while others may learn more effectively with visual aids (i.e., charts and images).

### 1. Quiet Corner

- **Cozy space:** Set up a corner with rug, calming visuals, canopy, pillows, books
- **Noise-canceling headphones:** To reduce auditory distractions and to prevent/decrease negative behavioral outbursts from occurring.

### 2. Sensory Bins

- **Bin with various materials:** Bins can be filled with everyday objects such as rice, beans, coins, sand, and water beads. These objects help to support tactile exploration and fine motor coordination skills.

### 3. Movement

- **Balance balls:** Encourage an increase in student in-seat behavior. It can help increase levels of attention and increase attention on tasks.
- **Stretch bands:** Attach them to the bottom of students' chairs to effectively direct energy to help manage behaviors.

Side note: Movement is part of Action Based Learning (ABL). ABL focuses on brain body connection and how movement can help a student's brain learn. See more on how you can incorporate ABL in your classroom. [Action Based Learning at All Levels PDF](#)

#### 4. Calm Down Tools

- **Zones of Regulation Cards:** Help students identify and express their feelings. (See link below for free print-off)
- **Breathing Exercises:** Breathing techniques can help decrease tension and anxiety. It helps to regulate a Students' para-sympathetic nervous system which can take the child out of flight or flight and move them into a state of relaxed and responsive state. (See link below for free print off)

#### **What is the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems?**

The sympathetic and parasympathetic synaptic systems are divisions of the autonomic nervous system with largely opposing roles: the **sympathetic system** prepares the body for a "fight-or-flight" response by increasing heart rate and energy mobilization, while the **parasympathetic system** facilitates a "rest-and-digest" state by slowing heart rate and increasing digestion.

Please click on link below for free handouts of above-mentioned resources. [Free Printables](#)

## There is Room for Everyone

Part of inclusion in the classroom includes the principle of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). So, what is Universal Design for Learning? UDL was developed to ensure that designs include all learners' needs. It focuses on the environment and the potential barriers that it might impose on those using it.

Why as an educator is it important for you to understand UDL?

In a school, there are natural environmental barriers to a learning environment. These barriers may look like materials, lighting, assignments, seat set up and more. UDL gives you easy and accessible ways to help foster an inclusive learning environment for all students. UDL may look different in every classroom, but it all follows the same principles. If you utilize UDL your classroom will become flexible for all students, and students will have more resources for their lessons.

[Universal Design for Learning Video](#)



# Teacher Wish List

Click on the links to find the classroom sensory items listed before.



## **Fidget Spinners:**

<https://a.co/d/hXmknAU>

## **Sensory Cube:**

<https://a.co/d/3zFFMtK>

## **Sensory Bottles:**

<https://a.co/d/gLdnnIV>

## **Lights:**

<https://a.co/d/iHW4Cgn>

## **Noise Cancelling Earphones:**

<https://a.co/d/8C8Vqiq>

## **Balance Ball:**

<https://a.co/d/6tPz7ED>

## **Resistance Bands:**

<https://a.co/d/0ApsilL>

## Inclusion in the Classroom

How to effectively incorporate sensory items to ensure they are not used as added distractors in your classroom:

Ensuring that the kids know that the classroom sensory items are tools to help to learn will ensure they are being used properly.

Simple social stories are beneficial to help them understand the reasons and rules for using fidgets in the classroom. Here are some practical samples of social stories that you can use for your students

"I use fidgets to help me focus on my work"

"I use fidgets to help me pay attention"

"I only grab my fidgets when I feel that I need them"

"I always put my fidgets away when I am done"



# Inclusion in the Classroom

How to effectively incorporate sensory items to ensure they are not used as added distractors in your classroom:

## **Check-in-Checkout System:**

This creates an opportunity for students to understand that these items are the property of the classroom and to be treated kindly and respectfully.

The check-in-out systems create an opportunity to teach responsibility. This not only benefits behavior in the classroom but outside the classroom as well.

It helps to create positive reinforcements for behavior. If students know they can get a sensory item for the day, they are more likely to manage their behaviors more effectively



**For a free template click link below:**  
[Free Template](#)

## **Remember!**

Fidgets can be fun and exciting for kids. Slowly introducing them can be crucial to their level of success in managing disruptive behaviors

# Everyone Deserves the Right

As educators, it is crucial to understand and comply with legal requirements related to student accommodations that ensure no one is prevented from learning content. Two key components to understand are Section 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Here is why adherence to these plans is not just a best practice but a legal obligation

## 1. 504 Overview

### What It Is:

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. This law requires schools to provide and implement modifications and accommodations to ensure they have equal and fair access to education.

Students who do not require special education services or specialized instructions fall under this act. A student qualifies for a 504 if they have any learning, walking, breathing, or eating impairments. They may have difficulties that limit communication, hearing, vision, concentration, learning or thinking.

More on 504 Below:

[504 Fact Sheet](#)

# Everyone Deserves the Right

## Teacher Responsibilities Under Section 504

### Application:

As educators, you are legally required to apply the accommodations set in place by the student's 504 plan. This can include adjustments to teaching methods, materials, and classroom settings or ensuring they attend services outside your classroom (OT, PT, SLP)

### Monitoring and Reporting:

Teachers must regularly monitor the effectiveness of the accommodations and report any issues or needed adjustments to the 504 team.

## 2. Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) Overview

### What It Is:

An IEP is a written plan developed for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is an outline for specific educational goals and accommodations that are tailored to that individual's need. An IEP is reviewed annually. Students under IEP require special education services or specialized instructions. Students who have IEPs should be in the same classroom as their other peers as much as possible. This is known as Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) - it is an important part of IDEA. Due to this principle a student's IEP plan must specify what

classes or periods a student is going to be outside of the General Ed classroom.

More on IEP's below:

[IEP vs 504](#)

## **Everyone Deserves the Right**

### **Teacher Responsibilities Under IEP**

#### Compliance:

Teachers are legally required to follow a student's IEP as it is written. Similarly, as mentioned above, this includes allowing students to be excused from class to attend other services (OT, PT, Speech).

#### Progress Monitoring:

Tracking and reporting student progress is your duty as an educator under IDEA. Educators are required to ensure that students are receiving the support they need to succeed, and if not are required to adjust accordingly.

#### Legal Implications:

**Rights of Students:** Adhering to these plans ensures that students with disabilities receive the services and support they are legally entitled to, promoting a fair and equitable educational environment that contributes to challenging stereotypes and promoting understanding.

Compliance: Section 504 and IDEA are federal laws, and non-compliance can lead to legal consequences for both school and educator. This may include investigations, lawsuits, and a full corrective action in place by the U.S. Department of Education

## **Everyone Deserves the Right**

### **Why does it matter to you?**

Educational success: As an educator, you are responsible for the educational success of your students. By properly implementing accommodations, you are supporting the academic growth and success of students by removing unnecessary barriers and fostering an empathic school society that helps contribute to all individuals.

Professionalism: Educators have a code of ethics they must follow. Adhering to the legal requirements mentioned above reflect your commitment to the professional standards set in place by the educational association.

### Remember!

When educators do their role in embracing compliance, it is a step towards a more inclusive future. Schools should be a place where everyone can participate collectively and where diversity should be celebrated.

## Understanding Compliance

Accommodations for students can vary significantly based on their individual needs, strengths, and challenges. here are some practical accommodations you may see in your classroom

**Dyslexia:** A student with dyslexia uses colored overlays on their reading materials and has access to audiobooks to help with comprehension.

**ADHD:** A student with ADHD sits in a designated quiet area of the classroom with minimal distractions and uses fidget tools to help maintain focus during lessons

**Autism Spectrum Disorder:** A student on the autism spectrum uses a visual schedule and prefers to work in a smaller group to feel more comfortable and engaged.

**Sensory processing Disorder:** A student with sensory processing disorder might wear noise-canceling headphones during independent work time to minimize distractions from background noise, helping them concentrate better.

**Dysgraphia:** A student with dysgraphia is encouraged to use speech-to-text software (i.e., Natural Reader or google text to speech) for writing assignments, allowing them to express their thoughts without the challenge of handwriting

## Understanding Compliance

Students with disabilities may need additional adjustments to help them learn on the same level as their peers. You may see a few of these behaviors listed below:

- Reduced Self-esteem
- Poor organizational skills
- Oppositional
- Forget assignments
- Lack of planning skills
- Sensitivity to criticism or change
- Difficulty initiating task
- Challenges attending to a task



## Understanding Compliance

### Normalize Accommodations:

Emphasizing that everyone has different needs and preferences can help encourage your student and minimize the negative feelings.

### Provide Positive Reinforcements:

Students who have a disability may feel defeated or discouraged when it comes to schoolwork– whether they show it or not. Celebrating their strengths and successes will foster good self-esteem in your student. Focus on their progress and achievements!

### Have the Hard Conversations:

If you have a student who is struggling, do not ignore discussing their troubles. Acknowledge their disability openly, which will help to ensure everyone does not feel that they must hide it or keep their struggles in secrecy from others. This approach can foster a supportive environment where they feel understood.

### Words Matter:

Carefully choose how you phrase your conversations. This can include avoiding non-inclusive language. For more on inclusive language click this link: [What We Say Matters!](#)



## Understanding Compliance

### Check-in Frequently:

Having an open, supportive conversation about how their feelings can show you care and can prevent bigger problems from occurring.

### Socialization Matters:

We are social beings, so ensure that your students with a disability are included in all academic affairs. If you do have a student who has difficulties with socialization, you may assign lunch companions or create the buddy system.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, educators can effectively utilize and refer to the resources mentioned above to create a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment. By incorporating these strategies, you will not only reduce negative behaviors but also promote and encourage positive ones. This approach will benefit your students and help you become an educator who values, supports, and cares for all learners. When students feel respected, understood, and included, they are more likely to accept accommodations and, most importantly, embrace disability as an integral part of their identity and lived experience.

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